



by Mark Taylor

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Non-Sense; when trainers get together; hey student! your right foot and can you face up to it?

«Marker» is a regular column in Coyote, written by Mark Taylor, looking at issues in training and hoping to encourage debate, questions and even - who knows? – dialogue about intercultural learning...

▶ Non-sense

As I was taking the dog for a walk through the mean streets of Brussels, thinking about themes for this column (I mean, I was thinking about it, the dog was probably thinking about the chicken bones scattered along the path!) this kind of song kept going round in my head. It can be sung to a slight variation of “Bella ciao”:

J'étais pressé
J'étais stressé
Et j'ai comprimé
Toutes mes pensées
Dans une boîte de sardines*

* translation:

I was in a hurry
I was stressed
And I compressed
All my ideas
Into a tin of sardines

And you may ask me
Yes you may ask me
What the hell does this mean?

When I was very young my dad told me that the most depressing job in the world had to be “working in a fish factory with the task of closing the eyes of sardines before the tin was closed”. He may well have been right. Reminds me of fairly useless things we do as trainers, like giving participants a copy of a deadly powerpoint presentation, or introducing a massively long “energiser” when nobody actually needs one...

▶ Hey student!

Once again I was jumped on by a student! They are crazy people, some of them! This one was researching for a dissertation on the use of humour in training! Not just any training, but youth work training! Another one told me that he had just been accepted as a PhD student; the subject being – and I paraphrase here – training of trainers in international youth work and non-formal education! Great! Interesting! Is there a list somewhere of all these masterpieces?

▶ When trainers meet

It's a curious thing when you bring a large-ish group of trainers together in courses, pools, networks, consultation meetings or even parties. It's hard to work out what is really happening and, who knows, maybe one day some youth researchers will take the opportunity to map and decode such gatherings. There's certainly a whole lot of greeting going on. As a result of the project-driven nature of our work, quite a number of people get the chance to work intensively in a whole range of short-lived teams and then split up and go their separate ways. So hugs abound when they get the chance to come together again. For newcomers it can look like one huge happy family whose members love each other to bits! In a way, it is and the exchanges can be really stimulating and beautiful with many bubbling ideas and shared experiences and concerns.

In a way, it isn't. Those bubbling ideas? Could be marketable, turned into a concept for a course. Those concerns about daily rates of pay you raised? Find yourself a new area to work in, darling; there will always be others prepared to work for less. That dramatically original report back you just made? Could lead to you being “noticed” and invited to join a project team.

Yes, it's just like real life. Yes we need to look under the surface, but let's remember to keep some of that surface real and really happy.

Can you face it?

Have you been throwing sheep at your friends lately? Poking them? Inviting them to the Oktoberfest? Sending them fortune cookies, flowers or smelly sprays? Comparing your ratings of lousy films or “the things that attract me”? Have you woken up to find your own private zombie has been attacked or that someone stuck chewing gum in your hair overnight? Have you been invited to be friends with someone you have never met, even virtually? All of this, and more, can be yours if you allow yourself - like me - to be bullied into joining that thing called Facebook. You can find lots of potential friends, even the President of the European Commission is a member, and they can find you.

A growing number of people are starting groups on Facebook for participants of training courses (and, at the time of writing this, there are 138 members of the group called “We have been to European Youth Centre Budapest”). I thought it might be interesting to find out if there were any interesting ways to use Facebook for learning or training, so I used the tool which allows you to distribute a question to your “friends”. Within a couple of hours I had a fair number of answers, which can be summarised as follows:

- no! leave us (participants) alone! Facebook is for fun!
- yes, we are using it to share and collect ideas for a website
- yes, you can ask other trainers a load of silly questions to keep them awake at night
- yes, it really helps to get a deeper awareness of other people from different countries and cultures, especially those who you only met for a short time
- maybe, because it allows people to “hook up” again or be invited to particular events, but we should use other more efficient tools for learning

After using it for a couple of months, two aspects strikes me strongly: there are so many different ways to interact on Facebook that it does allow you to get very different visions of people you think you know; and it can really help to cement relationships. Is that enough?

References, influences and sounds



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Your right foot

A strange little e-mail landed in my inbox recently and I was reminded of Sonja Candek’s encouragement to make interesting shapes with our feet and hands in the last issue of Coyote.

- 1 Sit on a chair and raise your right foot off the floor and make circles with your foot in a clockwise direction.
- 2 When you are happy that your foot is making sufficiently beautiful circles, take your right hand and draw the number 6 in the air.
- 3 If you have followed the instructions correctly, then you will notice something very odd has happened to the direction in which your foot is making circles.
- 4 Try this as an exercise in your next course and be prepared to devote quite some time to examining the unbearable lightness of being...

And finally

Thanks to the invisibly present trainers who reacted to the last “Marker” by tapping on the window of my soul. Next time we work on the pataphysics of cultural codes and imprints in the run up to the US presidential election...

